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NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE AND IPA; NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/MUSTAFA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/25/2016
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KWBG](#) [PBTS](#) [IS](#) [KPAL](#) [KDEM](#)
SUBJECT: PALESTINIAN LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS: ELECTION DAY
SITREP # 1 AS OF 11:00 AM, JANUARY 25, 2006,

REF: JERUSALEM 00324

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles. Reasons: 1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary

¶1. (C) Con Gen election observers report elections proceeding smoothly in Jerusalem and Ramallah in the first hours of voting. PA President Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen), speaking to the media, commended the ongoing polling and described the events as "an election festival." Three polling stations in Nablus have been relocated in response to violence on January 24. Hamas is well represented outside polling centers. Palestinian Police arrested eight people for alleged involvement in the January 24 assassination of senior Fatah activist in Nablus. Meanwhile, preparations for the elections have resulted in a mini-economic boom for the West Bank services industry.

Jerusalem and Ramallah: Smooth Going

¶2. (C) Poloff covering Jerusalem reported that elections were proceeding smoothly in Jerusalem polling stations, and reports high voter turnout in the Jerusalem sites visited. In Shu'fat, north of Jerusalem, approximately 36,000 voters had participated by 10:15 am, with 26,000 of those votes going to Fatah according to exit polls.

¶3. (C) ConGen Pol FSN and Poloff reported from Ramallah that elections are running smoothly. Poloff reported that Palestinian Security Forces (PASF) were stationed outside the polling stations and that general intelligence personnel in plain-clothes are milling around, but not harassing the voters. Poloff estimated that ten to fifteen percent of eligible voters had participated in the Ramallah polling stations he had visited by 10:15 am.

Nablus: 3 Polling Stations Relocated

¶4. (C) The Palestinian Central Elections Commission relocated three polling stations in Nablus from the neighborhood where senior Fatah activist Ahmad Hasounah was killed on January 24 (reftel) to an-Najah University. During the night of January 24-25, Palestinian Police arrested eight members of a rival group in Fatah for involvement in the assassination.

 Hamas Presence

15. (C) Poloff covering Jerusalem said that there is a strong contingent of Hamas supporters at the polling stations and that there is a Hamas representative standing at the entrance of the polling station checking off names of supporters. PDOff reported that there has been a large voter turnout at the Shu'fat Post Office. She counted ten cars with Hamas flags and many people wearing green Hamas hats, waiting to vote. She said that, as of 9:35 AM, the situation is tense within the polling station because Fatah is upset over Hamas presence at Shu'fat and that there have already been verbal altercations between Fatah and Hamas supporters at the polling station. Poloff in Ramallah reported that Hamas is running a well-organized campaign and that they are transporting voters to the polling station.

 Some Voting Problems

16. (C) PDOff reporting from north Jerusalem reported that, as expected, Palestinian voters from Jerusalem are worried about lack of access to the polling station because of ID card problems and uncertainty of their status in Jerusalem. ConGen Pol FSN said that as of 9:30 AM, there had been complaints that the GOI is denying candidates entrance into polling stations inside Jerusalem (specifically at the Salah Ed-din and Beit Hanina Post Offices). He also said that, earlier in the morning Palestinian monitors had trouble reaching the Jerusalem polling stations, but the problem has been resolved. RSO reported that as of 9:30 AM, Palestinians have been complaining about a flying checkpoint

located near Road 417 near Maaleh Adumim settlement and El-Eizariya, to the east of Jerusalem.

 Security Reports

17. (C) RSO reported that two members of the Knesset, Efi Eitan and Arie' Eldad, plan to protest against elections at Jaffa Gate in Jerusalem at 9:30 AM. He added that the Jewish extremist Kahane Chai terrorist organization is threatening to disrupt elections inside Jerusalem. The RSO also noted that molotov cocktails and stones were thrown near a tunnel on Route 60 south of Jerusalem.

 Media Reports

18. (SBU) Early morning monitoring of Palestinian and pan-Arab TV stations reveals that PBC, Al-Hurra, al-Jazeera and others are airing extensive coverage of the election. According to reports, most polling stations in the West Bank and Gaza saw a rush of early voters, some lining up before the polls opened at 7:00 AM. However, according to PBC, this has not been the case in East Jerusalem, and the voting process has so far been slow. The station attributed this to the large presence of Israeli forces in the city, as well as the fact that many East Jerusalem residents are already at work.

-- All stations featured on-site interviews with candidates, election officials and voters as well as call-in commentary. Al-Hurra interviewed CEC executive director Ammar Dweik in Ramallah, while al-Jazeera aired an interview with Minister of Information (and Deputy Prime Minister) Nabil Shaath.

 Elections -- boon to West Bank services industry

¶9. (SBU) Palestinian daily Al-Quds reported January 25 on the strong economic activity in the West Bank due to the elections. Hotels and restaurants are filled to capacity in and around Ramallah catering to the 17,000 observers and the large foreign press corps in the area for the legislative elections. The daily quoted Ibrahim al-Hafi, Director General in the Ministry of Tourism, that the economic surge will likely continue for several days after the elections.

¶10. (SBU) The economic surge surrounding the elections has extended to other segments of the services industry. Al-Quds noted the increased movement of people between cities and villages in the West Bank with voters returning to where they are registered, thereby benefitting transport companies since most of the Palestinian population uses buses and taxis to move between areas of the West Bank. Vehicle rental companies are also experiencing a surge of business with political parties and independents renting vehicles to transport voters to the polls, especially in the Jerusalem area where most voters will vote outside of East Jerusalem. Operators of celebration halls saw an upswing in business with most rented out to party lists and independent candidates for campaign events and press events.

¶11. (SBU) The proliferation of campaign posters, banners, and other materials attest to the economic boom experienced by advertising agencies, Israeli suppliers of paper and ink, and print shops. Amal Masri, owner of the Ougarit advertising agency and printing house, told EconChief that work for Fatah, Hamas, and Moustafa Barghouti's "Independent Palestine" all went to print shops related to those parties. However, independent businesses still have more than enough work. Since campaign materials must be distributed or pasted up, the young and unemployed have also benefitted with campaigns paying on average NIS 50-100 (USD 11-22) per day to those pasting its posters to any and every vertical surface.

WALLES